

REFLECTION FOR BRIDGING SUNDAY
BUC, June 12, 2011 (final regular Sunday)

Friend, I have lost the way.

All transitions, whether they are desired or coerced, expected or unexpected, in the natural course of things or out of time, out of order, all transitions include the experience of being lost. We move from a familiar way of being to a place or a self we have never known before, and we have to learn once more how to be. I was married, and now I am not; I was young, and now I am older; I worked at one kind of job, and now I work at a completely different job; I lived in one house in the same neighborhood all my life, and now I live in a tiny apartment in an unfamiliar city; I held one set of beliefs about the way the world worked, and now I see I could not have been more mistaken. We enter a time of change by first losing our way.

The way leads on.

It may be that when a particular life stage continues for several years, or we hold a particular job for a long time, or we enjoy the same circle of friends and family through a host of experiences, we begin to believe that who we are and how we live will last, maybe, forever, or at least as far as we can see into the future. But the truth is that whether we notice or not, hold fast or loosen our hands, all we are and all we have is always changing, moment by moment, into something different, someone different.

Is there another way? The way is one.

Spiritual traditions in all places, at all times, teach us the hard truth that transitions are built into the very nature of reality. No matter what we do, we cannot elude them. But

this hard truth comes with the comforting truth that all of us travel this same path of transition, so that we do not travel alone, and we have others to help us navigate.

I must retrace the track. It's lost and gone. Back, I must travel back! None goes there, none.

Faced with unfamiliarity, our first response is likely to be one of turning around. Like hikers lost in the woods, we head back for the last known marker, the last place of familiarity. And while turning back may be a useful tactic in the woods, it is not a tactic available to us in our lives. The transitions we live through go only in a single direction, and that direction is forward to another self, another place, another time.

Then I'll make here my place—The road runs on—Stand still and set my face—The road leaps on. Stay here, forever stay. None stays here, none.

With heading back no longer an option, our next recourse is likely to be one of digging in our heels, refusing to move another inch, refusing to move with the transition that pulls at us. But because movement, not stasis, is all there is, any effort to stand in place will only exhaust us and, in the end, fail. Children get older and more independent and move away, relationships blossom and fade, our very selves unfold continually. The resolution to remain unchanged will, in time, be torn from our grasp.

I cannot find the way. The way leads on.

Simply acknowledging that one is lost and facing a situation that has never been faced before, that may require knowledge and abilities we do not presently have, can sound like an admission of failure before even beginning. But to fully embrace a transition does seem to require just that: recognizing that a whole new reality is unfolding, where we will be challenged in ways we have never before faced. William Bridges, an author who

has written extensively on transitions in personal life and in organizations, suggests that a transition begins as an ending—and a large part of that ending is the end of what we have known and what we have been able to do.

Oh, places I have passed! That journey's done.

Bridges also recognizes that grief will accompany a transition, even when the transition is desired and has been anticipated. We say good-bye to faces and places and the person we have been, and all those losses come with grief.

And what will come at last? The way leads on.

We cannot guess at what the future holds for the young people who are bridging today, no matter how well-planned their lives appear right now. We cannot know, when a longtime relationship ends, whether there will be another opportunity for love. We are not fortune tellers, none of us, not the fortune tellers of crystal ball and tea leaf stories, nor the fortune tellers who watch trends and predict what the next big thing will be, nor the fortune tellers who inhabit parental predictions of success or heartbreak. The way leads on, and because none of us has already traveled it and come back to tell about it, we cannot know what lies ahead. All we can know is that we have one another as we move through these transitions. And that is more than enough.

A story from the Native American tradition recounts advice given to youth who were undergoing that tradition's version of bridging. The advice is as follows: "As you travel through life, you will come upon a great chasm. Jump! It is not as far across as you may think."